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NICARAGUAN EXILES SEE CONTRAS IN DISARRAY

By Brian Barger and Robert Parry

WASHINGTON

Prominent Nicaraguan exiles say the U.S.-backed rebel movement is in disarray, with some contending that even President Reagan's plan for large-scale American military aid might not revive the war against that nation's leftist government.

The exiles, longtime opponents of Nicaragua's Sandinista government, said the U.S.-sponsored United Nicaraguan Opposition, UNO, had failed to heal divisions that long have plagued the war effort, and sparked complaints of American manipulation.

Several exiles added that the only realistic hope for ousting the Sandinista government is direct U.S. military intervention to crush the Soviet-supplied Nicaraguan army — an option the Reagan administration has rejected repeatedly.

The assessment by leading Nicaraguans in Miami, Washington and California came this week as Reagan prepared to ask Congress for as much as \$100 million in military and logistical aid for the Contra rebels — a proposal expected to reignite bitter debate over Central America.

Republican leaders have told Reagan that the perception of UNO's effectiveness as a democratic alternative to the Sandinistas is vital to his aid package.

"UNO will have to show that it is the legitimate political leader of the Contras, that it controls the military and has a platform for a democratic society for Nicaragua," said Sen. Richard Lugar, R-Ind., Senate Foreign Relations Committee chairman.

But Nicaraguan exiles interviewed by The Associated Press questioned UNO's success in unifying and controlling rebel ranks after it was created at the administration's urging last June.

The AP interviewed 22 anti-Sandinista Nicaraguan exiles about their views on the political and military situation.

UNO "was set up to function on paper, but not in action," said Jose Medina Cuadra, a Nicaraguan attorney living in Miami who has resigned from UNO. He complained that it "hasn't done anything either for those fighting in Nicaragua or those in exile."

Even with a massive infusion of U.S. military aid, the rebels "can never overthrow the Sandinistas on their own," Medina said. He said he would support direct U.S. intervention in Nicaragua "because the Soviets and the Cubans have already intervened and control Nicaragua."

"UNO is designed to do battle in Congress, not to do battle in the front lines, with the people of Nicaragua," said Silvio Arguello-Cardenal, a former Nicaraguan vice president now living in Miami. "It owes its existence ... exclusively to ... U.S. intelligence agencies that provide it direction and exercise strict, every-day control over its military operations and political pronouncements."

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Conservative exiles particularly criticized the inclusion of former Sandinista officials Arturo Cruz and Alfonso Robelo in the triumvirate that runs UNO. They hold Cruz and Robelo responsible for the Sandinistas' confiscation of their property and they contend the U.S. attempt to broaden the rebel movement by including them has only deepened divisions.

The third UNO leader is Adolfo Calero, head of the CIA -organized Nicaraguan Democratic Force, FDN, the largest rebel army. But his presence also has been divisive, with rival rebel factions charging that UNO's management of \$27 million in non-lethal U.S. aid - mostly food, medicine and clothing - is intended to subjugate them under the conservative FDN.

Since UNO was formed last June with the FDN as its principal military arm, the FDN has mounted only one offensive. Last summer, rebel forces were driven back into Honduras by the Sandinista army, which used Soviet Mi-24 helicopter gunships for the first time.

Former Sandinista hero Eden Pastora, who leads a rival rebel group based in Costa Rica, Revolutionary Democratic Alliance, or ARDE, said rebel unity is crucial to the struggle but must be "carried out in an atmosphere of equality and not submission."

Armstrong Wiggins, a spokesman for an Indian rebel group, Misurasata, said UNO has used the U.S. logistical aid to split the Indian factions and lure their fighters into the FDN.

Misura rebel Indian leader Steadman Fagoth described UNO as "a new political arm of the FDN" that has failed to create the unity needed to enhance the rebels' international standing. He said the lack of unity "has demoralized the troops in the field. They are losing confidence in their leaders' ability to form a united front against the common enemy."

But behind the criticism of UNO is the recurring theme that Americans, not Nicaraguans, control and direct the anti-Sandinista war, even after Congress cut off CIA military aid to the rebels in 1984.

"The revolution is out of the hands of Nicaraguans - the movement is in the hands of foreign forces," said Salvador Icaza, a former Contra commander now living in the United States. He said rebel leaders do not "represent the aspirations of Nicaraguans - they represent the U.S. interest."

Bernardino Larios Montiel, a former Nicaraguan military official jailed by both the rightist Somoza dictatorship and the leftist Sandinista government, complained that more U.S. aid will likely lead only to more American control.

"I would rather we maintained some of our dignity, and not accept any more ... American aid," said Larios, who now lives in Miami and recently resigned from a UNO advisory commission.

But several saw U.S. military aid and a broader-based rebel movement as essential to defeating the Sandinistas, and grudgingly accepted Cruz and Robelo as the price for that assistance.

"If that's what some people in the U.S. government feel that we have to do, then that's what you have to do," said Eduardo Montealegre, a former leading Nicaraguan banker now living in Miami.

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UNO is sensitive to the charge that its leaders _ who advocate democracy for Nicaragua _ were hand-picked by the United States.

Bosco Matamoros, who serves as a spokesman for both the FDN and UNO, conceded that there was no formal process for electing Calero, Robelo and Cruz to lead UNO. But he said the choice represented a "consensus" of Nicaraguan political figures living in exile and was an important step toward ending the divisiveness that has undermined the rebel movement.

"Ours is a democratic organization in which all Nicaraguans are invited to participate," Matamoros said.